

The Egyptian University in the World of Freedom

*A Hero among the Heroes of Modern Democracy — al-Musawwar,
11 May 1934.*

His father drove carriages in a village, one of many villages, unable to read or write, touching nothing of life's affairs beyond this humble trade of his, and beyond what people like him, simple, unlettered, and hard-living, know how to do well; and his mother was a servant to a lady of the manor house, with no hope beyond winning her mistress's favor, keeping her husband at ease, and raising her son as the sons of the poor, wretched classes are raised. These poor, wretched classes had won a measure of freedom two years before our child was born, and our child was born in the year 1850.

This modest freedom, which had opened its humble doors to these wretched people, had stirred in their souls something of pride, and had opened for them narrow windows onto hope — narrow windows, but windows all the same, through which light and air could pass, and through which life's horizons widened a little, after having been exceedingly narrow.

The carriage-driver in that village had felt something of this breeze let in by those windows, and had cast his eye through them toward a horizon wider than his own old one; and so he disliked the thought that his son should be a carriage-driver like himself, and hoped to raise him somewhat toward a better trade, and a slightly higher calling than his own. He began by sending him to school, and once the boy had learned there the rudiments of writing and arithmetic — and his father learned these rudiments alongside him — he sent him to learn the craft of shoeing horses; then he raised him a little further, sending him to learn the craft of the blacksmith. One day the boy went out to fetch water for the shop, carrying the water-vessel in his coarse garb, a figure the eye recoiled from, with no small measure of grime upon his face, when he caught sight of one of those who had taught him at school; he felt ashamed, and tried to hide, so as not to be forced to greet him — but his teacher had already seen him, and sensed his shame, and gave no sign of recognizing him; instead he went to the boy's mother and spoke to her about him, a conversation that changed the whole course of his life. Before the sun set that day, the boy had set off with his teacher for a nearby town, where

there was a school the boy joined — not to seek learning, for he was too poor for that, but to be a servant, or something like one, in the hope that living in that environment might let something of the learning dispensed there from morning till evening seep into his soul.

In this town the boy came into contact with the church, and learned music and singing there; the singing was in Latin, and so the boy memorized songs he did not understand, and it pained him to sing what he could not understand; so he taught himself Latin, that he might understand the singing. It was not long before the priest discovered that the youth understood Latin, and so thought too highly of him to leave him to ignorance and this idle life, and sent him on to a secondary school. From that time his life grew somewhat more settled, and his path grew straight after its twists and turns; he completed his secondary studies, then joined the university in Vienna and completed his studies there, then traveled to Leipzig and studied at its university, then returned to his homeland, and behold — he was a university professor in the city of Prague. I do not know whether you have recognized this man or not, but I prefer not to name him just yet, and to let his own life name him instead, or let the days that wrestled and grappled with him name him — the days that could not throw him down, but were instead compelled to yield to him. This man remained a university professor, teaching the youth of his countrymen the principles and branches of philosophy, but teaching them too what true manhood is, what proud dignity is, what freedom is that abasement can find no way to touch, and then what it is to be sincere and faithful to the truth, steadfast in it, sacrificing for its sake everything dear, and enduring for its sake every hardship.

One day the city of Prague and the towns around it were stirred by a grave matter: a manuscript had been discovered of a book purporting to prove that the Bohemians had been a people of culture, letters, and art in the second century of the Christian era, at a time when the Germans were savage barbarians clad in animal hides, living the roughest of lives.

You can imagine the effect this discovered book had on the soul of a nation the Germans had humiliated, and which aspired to freedom and pressed toward it. But the professor studied the book, and declared — neither hesitant nor swayed by the measure of public excitement it had stirred — that this book was a forgery, fabricated, without any authentic basis, and that it therefore proved nothing, and that the glory of nations ought not to rest on falsehood, nor depend on deception. At once the whole of public opinion turned against this professor, who had not yet

passed his thirty-sixth year; the whole people denounced him, plotted against him, and schemed against him in every way — yet he stood firm in his position, declaring that the book was a forgery, proclaiming that the glory of nations ought not to rest on falsehood and depend on deception, and the storm raged fiercely around him, but the tree stood firm, neither bending nor bowing, until, as days passed, then weeks, then months, then years, the truth came to light: the book was indeed a forgery, and the professor had been neither a traitor to his homeland nor a denier of its ancient glory, and those who had denounced him came to know him, and those who had plotted against him came to love him, and those who had schemed against him came to trust him, so that they sent him as their deputy to parliament.

Public opinion's repudiation of him did not frighten him, nor did public opinion's later trust in him seduce him, and he did not waver in his love of the truth and his fidelity to it; for he loved the truth for its own sake, not in order to quarrel with the people through it, nor to use it to win the people over. One day a girl was murdered, and a Jewish wayfarer was arrested and accused of her murder, and the matter grew grave because people supposed it a religious crime; but the professor traced the story and studied the case, and became certain that the Jew was innocent. The man had already been sentenced to death, and the professor demanded that the ruling be reconsidered, and pressed the matter insistently. At this the court turned against him, the sovereign turned against him, the whole of public opinion turned against him, and the youth grew exceedingly resentful of him — but he paid no heed to any of this, and pressed on in his call for what he believed to be the truth. One day he came to the university, and found the students standing to prevent him from giving his lecture; he and they struggled against one another until he made his way into the lecture hall and was about to speak, when they shouted until they drowned out his voice; he was about to write, and they stopped him from writing; the dean came and begged him to withdraw, and he withdrew from the lecture — but he did not withdraw from his call to the truth, until the sovereign was compelled to change the sentence, settling for imprisoning the Jew and sparing him death. Then the days passed, and events followed one upon another, until the Great War was declared, and there was our friend in Geneva, with a number of his friends who shared his concern and his inclination, all hating foreign rule, all desiring the homeland's independence, all enemies of Austrian sovereignty, resentful of the House of Habsburg; and they formed among themselves a National Council, working at first in

Geneva, then moving to Paris, where its activity grew and its influence spread, until it raised an army of its countrymen numbering some one hundred and fifty thousand fighters in the ranks of the Allies. Then October of the year 1918 had not yet ended before the independence of Czechoslovakia was declared, on the fourteenth of that month; and not a month passed before the National Assembly convened in Prague, and the Republic was established, and its constitution was proclaimed, and Tomáš Masaryk was elected President of the Republic, the constitution granting him a privilege shared by none of his fellow countrymen: that he might stand for election to the presidency of the Republic at every election during his lifetime, while no one else was permitted to be elected president more than twice.

And he will be elected for the fourth time as President of the Republic, on the twenty-fourth of this month.

This is the child whose father drove a carriage in a village, one of many villages, and whose mother was a servant to a lady of the manor, and whose father wished to make him a blacksmith, but whose own great soul made him president of the republic in his homeland — indeed, the founder of the republic in his homeland, indeed, the proclaimer of independence in his homeland, indeed, a hero among the heroes of modern democracy and a philosopher among its philosophers. How fitting it would be for the youth to know him, and to love him, and to take him as one of these lofty models worthy of emulation; and how fitting it would be for them to read, about him and his doctrine of democracy and the principles of government, a delightful and splendid chapter, published by the magazine *L'Illustration* in its issue of 28 April 1934.